

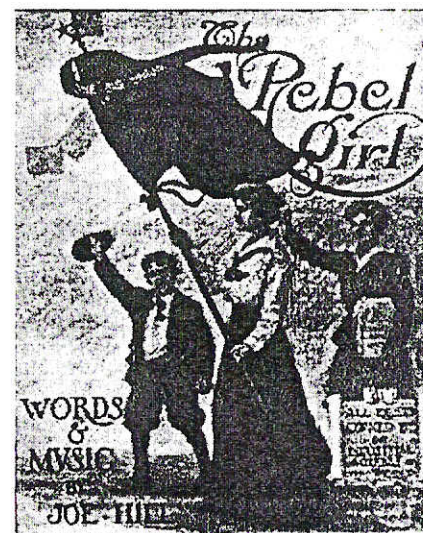
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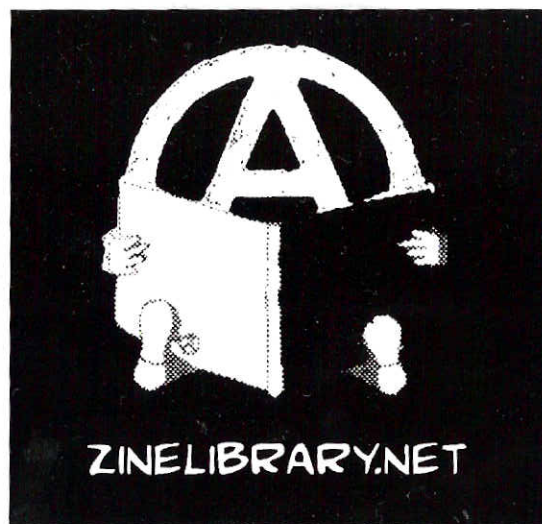
Red Dawn Press - Cincinnati, Ohio

## Memories of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)



by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn





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### Original Publisher's Preface

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn addressed students and faculty members of Northern Illinois University, in DeKalb, on November 8, 1962, less than two years prior to her death. Her talk was sponsored by the History Club of the University and its chapter of the Student Peace Union. The occasion was chaired by Kenneth Owens, an assistant professor of history at the University.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's remarks were offered without notes; they were tape-recorded and it is a transcript of that tape which is herewith published for the first time.

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### About This Edition

This edition is based a 48 page pamphlet of transcription on the last known public presentation by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn about her experiences with the Industrial Workers of the World.

The original edition was a Xerox copy of a typescript. It had been published in 1977 by the American Institute of Marxist Studies (AIMS). AIMS was carried out more or less single-handedly by Herbert Aptheker and it seems not to be in existence any longer. Aptheker still lives in San Jose, California.

This edition maintains the original text, but has been reformatted for this publication.



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## Memories of the I. W. W.

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Q. Do you know of any labor group today serving the function parallel to that served by the IWW?

A. Well, I would say, yes, that the trade unions of today, with all their faults, of which many of them are very conscious, the combined organization of the AFL-CIO, and the independent unions, such as the Mine, Mill and Smelter Union, the Teamsters Union and others are doing good work in fighting for the interests of the workers and in fighting for the rights of the workers. Now, they could do better but, nevertheless, we would be very bad off if we didn't have the labor movement as we have it today and with struggle, undoubtedly, it will improve. I think of all the unions, that the one that may come the closest to the old IWW traditions would be the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union, which grew out of the Western Federation of Miners. But there are many fine unions in our country today and we shouldn't always believe the attacks we read in the newspapers on the leadership, and even if the leadership is sometimes stodgy and conservative, it doesn't mean that the rank and file of those unions are not alert to their own interests and greatly disturbed about many of the problems that exist in connection with the industry today. I would say that automation is something that is profoundly disturbing the American workers today and may very well result in a struggle for the 35 hour week that may be comparable to the struggle in the 80's for the 8 hour day.

Q. Could you say something about the festivities tomorrow in your honor?

A. Well, it is a birthday party. It is a little bit belated because my birthday was in August, but I didn't get to Chicago until now. It is a birthday party and it is being held in the Hamilton Hotel and the proceeds are for the benefit of the defense of Gus Hall and Benjamin J. Davis that's about all. I suppose I will make a speech, probably answer questions as usual and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if I get to the pearly gates and start answering questions right away.

(laughter)

Q. (from the chair): Miss Flynn, we will close with that question. Thank you very much.

A. It has been my pleasure.

(Applause)



Q. (from the chair): I would like to follow this up with a short question of my own. I have a reference somewhere when you were about 26, you wrote a manual on Sabotage. Did you ever --

A. Do you mean, commit sabotage or write about it?

Q. Well, write about it.

A. Well, the circumstances of writing this particular pamphlet was that it had to do with a man who was arrested in the Paterson strike in 1912 and he was accused of inciting to destruction of property. His name was Boyd. Well, I made a speech from which this pamphlet was made, in which I attempted to show that it was the silk manufacturers and not the workers who were guilty of sabotage, that the sabotage in this instance consisted of the silk manufacturers loading the silk with lead in the dyeing process so that you thought you had a silk dress and you had a dress that was partly lead and that was one reason that they used to crack and split and so I went on from that to explain that sabotage as the Scotch understood it, was chicanery, you know, take it slow, easy, and as the French understood it, was to obey the rules and if you opposed the rules, for instance on a railroad, the railroad got tied up in no time at all. This was the theme of my sabotage as I recall. There was no advocacy of violence in it. However, it was used. This was in 1913. It was used in trial after trial of the IWW, until I asked the IWW to stop publishing it because I hadn't intended it to be used as a weapon by the Government against the people who were on trial. So they did stop publishing it about the year 1917. However, an awful lot of copies got around and when I was before the Subversive Activities Control Board as a witness in more recent years, all of a sudden, what do I see but this little pamphlet pop up. I was as embarrassed as a man of 60 might feel if he were confronted with a love letter that he wrote when he was 17 and I said oh, that I wrote this many years ago in connection with a strike. It has no reference to today, etc. But it is true that in my young and hotheaded and heedless days, I had written a pamphlet on the subject of sabotage. There was quite a wave of interest in sabotage at that time in this country as it was practiced in France; this railroad business that I talked about and it really did not mean act of violence as it was interpreted.

Q. I would like to ask Miss Flynn what her present labor and political associations are.

A. I had a feeling of being circumscribed by the subject so that it is rather difficult for me to answer that question under the McCarran Act. I am known as a spokesman of the Communist Party, but whether I am a member or an officer, I will just have to take the Fifth Amendment on that because of the McCarran Act. I am not at the present time connected with any labor union. I am on social security. I don't think that I would be quite competent at the age of 72 to be working at any particular field of work outside the limited speeches and writing that I do today.

Q. How large a role did the IWW play in the meatpacking strike in the early 1900's in Chicago?

A. Chicago, well I don't know. The other day a young man came to see me from a college in New York. He was writing a thesis on the Paterson strike and he went over there and looked all through the newspapers, and everything, and he said, "Do you remember a young woman who spoke in Havretia Hall with 600 shirtmakers and they all joined the IWW, that was before the big silk strike?" I said, "no, I don't remember who she was." And he laughed and he said, "It was you." So it was very difficult for me to say. I don't recall. There may have been efforts of the IWW to organize the packinghouses. It wouldn't have been in 1900 because the IWW wasn't organized until 1905. It might have been after that. I think the first real efforts to organize the packinghouse workers were made by William Foster with this Committee of the AFL that I have described in the years 1918-19. But I may be wrong, I just can't remember everything about the IWW. Some of you students who are studying about it can refresh my memory.

## Memories of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

I am sorry but it is little easier for me sitting down. I hope you don't mind, however, it possibly makes it a little less formal.

When I was informed about the subject that I was to speak here on I had a strange feeling like somebody who might have driven a pony express, a sort of "I was there" kind of topic. However, it is a topic which of great interest to me when I take time to go back over the past, and I will plunge right into it because I do not want to spend too much time in introduction.

I was asked to speak about primarily the IWW. Well, those are the initials for the Industrial Workers of the World which used to be called the "I Won't Work" which was extremely incongruous because actually the people who belonged to the organization were in the basic, most difficult hard-working industries of our country. To call it the workers of the World was rather an ambitious name as actually it never did go beyond the confines of the United States and it grew out of the desire of American workers to continue the traditions and the form of organization of the old Knights of Labor.

I was very young when I first came in contact with the IWW. It was organized in Chicago in the year 1905 and I left school. I am not putting myself forward as any example to you because I felt that Socialism was just around the corner and had to get into the struggle as fast as I could. My father and mother were Socialists, members of the Socialist Party. So all of us of the younger generation were impatient with it. We felt it was rather stodgy. Its leaders were, if you will pardon me for saying so, professors, lawyers, doctors, minister, and middle-aged and older people, and we felt a desire to have something more militant, more progressive and more youthful and so we flocked into the new organization, the IWW.

It was not only the inheritor of many of the traditions of the 1880's but personalities who were identified with the 1880's were present at the early conventions of the IWW. The names may not be known to you unless you are students of labor history but included were such figures as Gene Debs, Daniel DeLeon and Mrs. Lucy Parsons, who was the widow of Albert Parsons, one of the Chicago Anarchists in the 1880's, who was hung, during the very fierce struggles for the 8-hour day. Now, in addition to these Socialists and Knights of Labor figures, there were also figures from unions, unions that were more industrial in character than the craft unions that were identified with the AFL, such unions as the Brewery Workers, the Western Federation of Miners and others.

### The IWW and the Fight for Free Speech

Now, the IWW, strangely enough, could be divided into two sections and the two sections didn't always, were not always identified in the same kind of struggle. In the west, west of Chicago, it consisted mostly of American-born migratory workers, young workers, young men who had followed the advice of Horace Greeley, "Go west, young man" and grow up with the country. Well, they might not have needed to grow up with it, they helped the country to grow up. They were engaged in agriculture, in the construction industries, in maritime, and they were miners, hard-ore miners in the far west, and iron-ore miners in the far range of Minnesota.



These workers were transients, practically no roots in the communities of the areas where they worked. In fact, it was said that they seldom left the IWW halls to go uptown into what they called the scissors belt sections of the city. Naturally, as transients, they did not vote so they had little or no interest in the politics of the areas. There was a tendency on the IWW's to become more and more limited, to organize in the industries and [show] less and less concern in political action of any sort. This was strangely in contradiction to the fact that many of the struggles in which they were engaged were actually political struggles. There were many free speech fights. I had to pronounce that very distinctly, not because some of you come from speech classes but because I was also very seriously misunderstood by an attorney in the Subversive Committee Control Board who said, "How many of these street fights were you engaged in?" "Oh, I didn't say street fights, I said, free speech fights", and he looked rather confused. They usually arose over city ordinances that were passed in communities like Missoula, Montana, where I happened to be at one time and also Washington, where these city ordinances forbade street meetings in the area of the employment agencies, and said that the IWW might go way out some place where there was a very nice park and no ordinance, of course, and speak there.

Well, their techniques were something like the Freedom Riders of today. They would send out telegrams, and; I am explaining, you understand, I am not agitating, they would send out telegrams something like this, and say: "Foot Loose Wobblies, come at once, defend the Bill of Rights", and they would come on top of the trains and beneath the train, and on the sides, in the box cars and every way that you didn't have to pay fare, and by the hundreds literally they would land in these communities, to the horror and consternation of the authorities and they would stand up on platforms or soap box and they would read part of the Constitution of the United States or the Bill of Rights.

I remember one big and strong lumberjack who, frightened to death, went up on the box and read the First Amendment to the Constitution and then looked around rather helplessly for the cops, but the cops went elsewhere so he read it again and when he read it about three times, the policeman came along and yanked him down, much to his relief, and these performances were repeated innumerable times. They would fill the jails and, of course, that was quite an expense to a small community. Eventually the citizens would say, let them speak, why not, and the ordinance would be declared null and void and a great victory was won for Civil Liberties, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and they would go back to their criticisms of these employment shops which, they said, had discovered perpetual motion, who always had a gang of workers going to a job, a gang on the job and a gang coming away from the job, all of whom had paid for the job.

### **The IWW Organizes Immigrant Workers, the Lawrence Strike of 1912**

Well, those were the free-speech fights that are very well known and very characteristic of the IWW in the western part of the country. In the eastern part of the country the IWW dealt with workers, mainly, who were not eligible to join the AFL and which the AFL did not want. The AFL was the skilled workers' organization and its form and methods and principles were not the same as the IWW. The IWW believed in the class struggle. They didn't believe in the brotherhood of capital and labor and they believed that these unorganized foreign-born mass production workers should be organized in an industrial union - all together in one union and not split up into a dozen or more organizations.

These foreign-born workers in the eastern part of the country at one time were men and women who just came off the boats. In fact, many of these big companies actually imported them. I saw, when I was in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912, I saw posters that had been put up in Montenegro, and these posters showed the workers of Lawrence, Massachusetts coming out of the mill on one side with bags of money under their arm and going into the bank on the other side.

## **Questions from Audience**

**Q.** Were you ever arrested, Miss Flynn?

**A.** Oh, yes, many times. Let me see if I can tell you how many times. I was arrested in Missoula, Montana in a free speech fight; in Spokane, Washington, in a free speech fight. I was arrested in Paterson during the strike there. I was arrested in the IWW cases. I have to think a minute. I was arrested more recently under the Smith Act, and I was sent to prison under the Smith Act, for a three year sentence which I served. Well, I might have been arrested -- oh, I was arrested in 1906, when I was 16 years old for blocking traffic on Broadway in New York.

**Q.** Joe Hill was executed - what were the legal reasons and circumstances?

**A.** Well, Joe Hill had been involved in this copper strike that I spoke about. He was arrested in Salt Lake City on a charge of holdup. The witnesses that were against him were very vague and noncommittal but the prejudice against the IWW was so great that that was all you needed to be convicted in that time and place. There is a very fine play that has been written by Barry Stavis, called the "Man Who Never Died", which gives the whole story of, first of the Joe Hill case, and then of the story in a play form and I am sure you might be interested to read it. It was so generally believed that he was not guilty that the Swedish Government -- he was born in Sweden -- intervened on his behalf. President Wilson intervened twice on his behalf with the Governor of the State of Utah, and asked at least for a new trial. But these pleas were denied and he was executed. And I use the word executed advisedly because in the State of Utah they have shooting. They have five armed men, one of whom has a blank, and if the prisoner prefers to be shot rather than hung this is the procedure.

**Q.** What was he personal character of Daniel DeLeon?

**A.** I don't know what you mean by "personal character". He was a very mild man - if that is what you mean. Daniel DeLeon was at one time Professor of Law at Columbia University. He was from Latin America originally and he was Editor of the paper of the Socialist Labor Party called the "Daily People" and also "The Weekly People". The "Weekly People" is still published. Maybe you have seen a copy now and again. Daniel DeLeon was one of the strongest proponents of industrial unionism in the early days in this country. He had belonged at one time to the Knights of Labor and he was one of the founders also of the IWW but when the IWW swung away from political action and became more and more anti-political, Daniel DeLeon quarreled with the leadership and severed his connections with the IWW. He continued as the Editor of the Weekly People up to the time of his death and was really one of the forerunners of industrial unionism in our country, regardless of his differences with the leaders of the IWW.

**Q.** Will you comment on the Committee you served on to free Earl Browder?

**A.** Well, that was at a much later date. That was in -- you see I was asked to confine my remarks here to the labor history of the 20s and around that period. I will answer the question just briefly but I was Secretary of the Defense Committee to free Earl Browder in the 40's. I don't think it would be proper for me to go into all the details in view of the limitation of the subject here tonight.

**Q.** What was your position in the IWW?

**A.** Well, I was never an official of the IWW. I guess was too young. I was a speaker. I was an agitator. I used to go round the country lecturing but I never was an official. I wasn't chairman or secretary or held any of those positions.



Now, today, education may be, I ought to say, that after I told you I left school at 16. Education is much more necessary today in industry than it was in these long ago years. In those days, we used to say that all you would need was the boss came out and looked the workers over, and if he was strong in the back and weak in the head, you were the one he hired, it that is no longer the case because more and more, with the introduction of automation and the introduction of new methods of production, it is not a question of manual labor alone.

It is a question of skill and it is a question of education and in the Socialist countries they do use automation in this way. They use it to abolish menial and arduous work, and they educate people to a higher level to able to cope with the complicated requirements of automation. Many will be laid off and are being laid off. Those that stay will need more training. Now, these are some of the problems of today. Now, you may ask me, and I am not going on any longer because I know you want to ask me, and I talked too long, have we made progress?

Oh, we certainly have, we certainly have, in spite of all the difficulties, in spite of all the problems, the labor movement has made tremendous progress. There is a new role and a new outlook for youth today. One of the pamphlets that I read years ago, I don't know if any of you have ever heard of it, is Peter Kropotkin's Appeal to the Young and it was a beautiful appeal to the young to carry forward their responsibility to make this world a better world to live in. Now, I feel in our way we did our best but the time comes when you know, they say old age isn't a disease but I say it is. The time comes when you have to slow down and lay off and give the benefit of your experience to a younger generation, if they want it. I feel very grateful to you for this opportunity. I very rarely speak on a subject like this and therefore I feel very grateful to you for the opportunity to relive my youth in a sense and to bring to you some of the tremendous struggles and sacrifices and ideals and hopes that went into the early years of this century to building the American labor movement.

(Applause)

I can answer questions from the audience for a short while, if we can get some house lights, and identify you, we will be pleased to have you. Thank you.

Well, naturally, when you lived in the sparse hillsides of Montenegro, that was quite an inducement, and there were actually in the City of Lawrence alone, twenty-five different nationalities who spoke forty-five different languages, but hardly any English.

Now these foreign-born immigrant workers naturally did not possess any political rights. They were not yet naturalized or enfranchised and therefore any protest that they might perchance make went unheeded because they did not represent any power, political power in their community. However, what precipitated the big strike in 1912, *which was known as the Bread & Roses Strike* which is one of the great historical struggles in our country, was a political act on the part of the State. The hour of labor were reduced to 54 hours. You can imagine what they were before. That was only for women and children, but it affected something like 75% of the workers in the mills.

On the first pay after the law went into effect, the employers cut the wages proportionately to the cut in hours and the wages were on the average of \$7 and \$8 a week at that time, and the highest pay to loom fixers and more highly skilled were getting possibly, \$15 and \$20. It was a margin between mere subsistence and starvation and so there was a spontaneous strike. Now, many people say such things don't happen, that they are really organized in advance but, sometimes, as one writer, Richard Rostran Childs, who afterwards became the Ambassador of our country to Italy, said, the melting pot boiled over and so they poured out of the mills. And, the AFL didn't want anything to do with them so they sent for the IWW and the IWW came on feet of lightning, and there came first Eitor and Giovannitti and they were there about three weeks or four weeks and then there was violence on the picket line as there often was. Not only the police were there but the State Militia was there. These two strike leaders were arrested and charged with inciting a murder, although the person killed was a woman striker, so they were out of the battle. They were tried many months after the strike was over and were acquitted.

### Big Bill Haywood

William D. Haywood, who had been the leader of the Western Federation of Miners, who had been tried out there on a similar framed-up charge of murder, came into Lawrence to lead the strike. Well, it seems like ancient history to say, but the man who subsequently became president of the United States, Mr. Coolidge, was then in the Legislature of Massachusetts and came on the investigation committee to see what the strike was all about. Well, I have been asked, because I understand some of you are interested in personalities, as well as this rather dry history, to explain something about what kind of person was Big Bill Haywood. Well, Big Bill Haywood was, as his name implied, a man over six feet tall, he was a miner from the State of Utah and he had always organized and spoken to English speaking people out there in the Western area. So we were a little dubious as to whether he would be able to handle the difficult task for all of us, of speaking to strikers who hardly understood English.

We did have interpreters in these forty-five different languages, but half the time we didn't know whether the interpreters were telling them to stay out on strike or go back to work. So you had to have other interpreters to watch the interpreters and it got pretty complicated. So Bill Haywood decided that we had to speak English so these people could understand it. And I will never forget the lesson he gave to us. I was very young at that time, I was 22, and he said, now listen here, you speak to these workers, these miners in the same kind of English that their children who are in the primary school would speak to them and they would understand that. Well, that's not easy -- to speak to them in primary school English.

Well, we learned how to do it. The only trouble is with me it kind of stuck and when I go to speak to a college audience I feel at a little bit of a disadvantage because I don't know all the big words. The small words, the short words, were the ones I was drilled in by William Haywood. Well, I will give you an example of how he used to speak.



We had to explain to them why we wanted them to be in the IWW, one big union and not in the AFL. Well, he would say, *[showing his hand/fingers spread]* the American Federation of Labor, the AFL, is like that, each one separated, but the IWW is like that, *[he would make a fist]* and they would all say, three cheers for the IWW and he had made his point.

Well, he was a tower of strength. He was way head and shoulders above the average worker, and they followed him around from place to place and admired him and followed his advice and actually the strike was won, in spite of all the difficulties; the strike was won, however, at great suffering and sacrifice. We took some of the children away from Lawrence to other cities once or twice. And then they tried to stop us and they beat up the children and the mothers and the committee in the railroad station in Lawrence (and took them to jail and a protest and roar went up from

They tore down that railroad station later. I am sure one reason is that they didn't want people to be pointing it out as the place where the police and the soldiers had beaten the women and the children. The result was a Congressional investigation which was brought into being by Victor Berger, the Socialist Congressman from Wisconsin, and the condition of those workers were so exposed to the whole country that the employers were only too happy to call it a day and bring the strike to a close. There were sixteen witnesses down there before the Committee. Children, and every one of those children were actually workers in the mills. It was before the days when we had any regulation on child labor. You see it is a long time ago, I am speaking of, but these are the flesh and blood struggles that made the labor movement as it is today. At the same time that this Lawrence strike was going on, there was a great strike of timber workers in Louisiana, also under the auspices of the IWW, and I single that out, although we had strikes all over the place, we were just hopping all over from one place to another, because there for the first time the discrimination, the segregation rules were broken down.

William D. Haywood went down there to speak and he said every striker sits wherever he wants to sit. Segregation in this hall of the IWW and the Negro and white workers, I think for the first time in American labor history, broke that taboo and met together.

I worked with many interesting people in those days. I really wish I had time to tell you about all of them, but I am singling out those that I think are better known to you possibly and are of interest to you. It wasn't long after those big strikes in the east, the Lawrence strike, and the Paterson silk strike, that there was a great strike of workers in the State of Utah. And it was there that Joe Hill, I am sure that all of you have heard of Joe Hill, the songwriter, troubadour of the IWW, was arrested. The little red song book, which never dies, apparently any more than the memory of Joe Hill, has many of his songs. And if there is really one thing that I am proud of in my long labor history, it is that while he was in prison, before he was executed, he wrote a song for me dedicated to me, that was called, the "Rebel Girl" and that song, I hope you will do it here some time, it may not be the best of words or the best of music, but it came from the heart and it was certainly so treasured.

### The Red Scare of WWI

Now, after this period of which I am speaking, I became more and more specialized in what is called labor defense work, although I had been engaged in the defense of Bill Haywood and Pettibone back as far as 1919, and Etor and Giovannitti and Joe Hill, and there came the arrest of Tom Mooney, Warren K. Billings and others, in San Francisco, and this labor defense work is something that is traditional in our country and with the American labor movement. Conferences were organized, that met regularly with delegates from every kind of organization. Socialist, Anarchist, IWW, AFL, no matter what, for the defense of Mooney and Billings.

Now the IWW's positive side, certainly it was militant, it was courageous, that it fitted the period, that it belonged to the pioneer days and that it fought for the interests of the poorest, the most lonely, the most despised, those that the AFL couldn't organize, the foreign born, the women, and as the Negroes began coming into industry, the Negroes. Of course, I should say that when we first started in 1905, there were not too many Negro workers in the north. They came up later. Henry Ford was responsible for bringing a great many of them, on all kinds of false pretenses and the steel industries brought them up also to act as strike breakers. However, they were very susceptible to the organization put forward by Foster and others.

### Conclusion

Now, I am going to tell you of a few of the things that we never heard of in those days. It is very well to realize the difference in the environment, the difference in the composition, the difference in the level of our development. We couldn't see things with the eyes of 1962. We saw them with the eyes of 1905 through about 1917. Well, we certainly never heard of such a thing and we never thought it would be possible, that there would be social security or unemployment insurance. Those were the results of the 30's. The great struggle that came out after the decline of the IWW. Also, we never heard of vacations with pay. We never heard of vacations, let alone vacations with pay. We never heard of seniority as it is understood today. There were no pensions for retirement of workers. There were no welfare funds of unions. There were no health centers of unions, and there were no trade union schools such as there are today.

All of these things have come with the unions that have come into existence since the period of the IWW. We had no political action committees and certainly we did not have and we didn't think of such a thing as being able to check off the dues in a closed shop by the employer. Well, of course, the employers don't like it and there is something about all kinds of repressive legislation to abolish it. We certainly never heard of paying farmers not to produce. That was something we would have said everybody was crazy if we said such a thing would come into existence.

Now, picketing with us, was everybody getting out, man, woman and child, and you ran up against the men on horseback, etc., but that was picketing. The other day I saw a picture of teamsters picketing. Well, I wish I could show it to the strikers in 1912. Here they were, sitting at a table, a round table, with a TV on it, and they had a pitcher and they had glasses, and I don't guarantee what was in it (laughter) an they had a big umbrella over their heads, like they have on the beach, and that was picketing by the teamsters but I'll bet they were just as effective in keeping anybody from going to work as we ever were with our mass picketing so many years ago. There is less violence against labor today, but there are more legal restrictions. There are more attempts to invade the rights of labor by repressive legislation and by all kinds of restrictions.

One of the most important issues today, even more important than wages to the workers, to our struggling with something we never heard of, is automation, are the work rules, the kind of speedup that there is today with automation is entirely different from the speedups that we knew in the old day. We never thought of such a thing that there would be a decreased labor force and increased production and that part of the plant would be left idle and the other part would produce more than the whole plant at one time. Now this, of course, are all the results of automation and 80 are new problems that we couldn't even foresee or even imagine in these long ago days. We had our own problems but they were quite different. There has been labor protection by law but there has also been labor repression by law, such as the Taft-Hartley Law and the Landrum-Griffin Law.



The IWW was very hard hit by all of these prosecutions, persecutions, terrible acts of violence. Frank Little, one of its organizers, was lynched in Butte, Montana. There were many acts of violence from one end of the country to the other. In fact, the hatred against the IWW was so great - that editorials in papers would say, "They should be arrested at dawn and shot before breakfast, without a trial. However, the IWW fought gallantly in its own defense and there was one of its last strikes in Denver in 1926 but by that time it was pretty well exhausted.

### **The Decline of the IWW**

In addition to this persecution, which was tremendous, there were certain immediate failings or immediate faults of the IWW which made it hard for it to continue a permanent existence although it tried to change its former organization and one very great effort was made in the agricultural field where they set up the AWO [Agricultural Workers Organization] by hundreds and that was with the idea of immediately getting 500 members, which they did, and more than that.

They had a mobile team of field organizers who went to work in the harvests in the very far South in the spring and traveled with the harvest right up to the Canadian line and right into Canada right into the fall. They carried a little, something like an attaché case of today, a little black case in which they had membership books and buttons and literature and dues stamps and all the paraphernalia of organization and the most remarkable thing was that there was practically no defections. Maybe one or two. One man actually stole money and then afterwards hung himself, I understand. You see there was a great devotion and loyalty to this mobile organization of migratory workers.

However, one difficulty, except for this one great event, was to hold an organization after a strike. It was very difficult because there were so many divergent elements involved in a strike that it was hard to hold together. At least, if they spoke a common language, it might have been easier. It was very difficult to combine all of them into one organization especially when you try to build a union and a Socialist organization in one body. Now, a union has the economic interests at stake, better wages, better working conditions, better hours, the immediate interests of the workers and you can involve thousands on that basis, whereas a Socialist organization naturally is what we would call today, on an ideological basis.

I never would have used such a word today but it had to be unity for a particular idea, for a goal, and not only workers but non-workers could also be involved in that kind of an effort. And so today the methods to have political auxiliaries to unions is a much better and a much more effective thing. But we tried to put everything in one pot and it simply didn't work. We were unable, and we were pretty arrogant. We were young and had the right answer to everything. We didn't want to work with the AFL, we didn't want to work with the Socialist Party, we didn't want to work with anybody else. And naturally, when the Communist Party came along, they considered that a real party because here was a much more revolutionary organization than the old Socialist Party, and they didn't agree either with the concept of the Russian Revolution although they were glad that it was a revolution that overthrew the Czar and they didn't stand with Kerensky but there was certain, you might almost call it, primitive concepts of a revolution. To the IWW a revolution meant that you take over the factories, and the shops and the mills, and the mines and the fields and you chase the bosses out, just chase them out, and that was the end of it. That was the revolution.

However, they ignored the state. Their idea was that the state would disappear, when you abolish capitalism, you abolish the state, but that the state might continue to exist, that it might be necessary for it to continue to exist, was not exactly within the IWW picture so naturally they expected a great deal more from a revolution in another country than it was possible for that country to achieve overnight.

Of course, it was many years before they were finally pardoned by Governor Olsen, but the agitation on their behalf and the conviction of their innocence was possessed literally by millions and millions of working people in this country.

Well, then we went into the period of World War I, that seems a very long time ago, I am sure, to you. I am still beyond the point where I don't think the majority of you had yet been born in this period of which I am speaking, but I am pretty sure of that. Well, in the period of World War I a tremendous onslaught was made against the IWW, the Socialists, and all Progressives in our country. There was a very strong peace movement at that time. It was not like World War II, which was an anti-fascist war.

World War I, the war that President Wilson promised to keep us out of, was not considered a war of any great principles and the result was that there were hundreds, literally hundreds of young Americans, and older ones too, who were arrested; there were conscientious objectors, like Evan Thomas, the brother of Norman Thomas, there were Socialists, like Congressman Berger, and others, there were IWW's, a hundred and some who were tried.

In here, in the City of Chicago and many others who were arrested under a Sedition Act, a wartime Sedition Act which went out with the end of the war. However, many of the people were tried and sentenced after the war was over as well as Eugene V. Debs, and were sent to prison after the war was over. Now, the IWW was really not persecuted because of their opposition to the war. Although they did oppose the war, they didn't all oppose the war. It wasn't a principled matter, because the IWW's main job was to fight the bosses and they stuck to it, I tell you, with great tenacity, and they were preparing, especially the lumber workers of the Northwest and the Pacific Coast states, for an 8-hour struggle to be declared on the first of May, 1917 and great preparations were made for it. It was to be what they called "blanket burn day." All the workers were to burn their blankets in a bonfire on that day and they were going to demand of the camp owners, clean blankets, a clean sheet, furnished by the companies and not being lugged around on their weary backs.

Well, this preparation was going on and then the war came. War was declared before the first of May. I had some clients that were in jail as a result of their opposition to the war and then I had others that were in the war and when they came out, they were arrested. For instance, the other day in California, I met an elderly man, his name was J. W. Fruit. I will never forget his name. This man used to write to me from Germany when he was with the American occupation in Germany during the First World War, and he used to send money to me for the defense of the IWW prisoners. I remember when he came back. He came back when Pershing came back and the victory Parade took place on Fifth Avenue and he came up to my Defense Committee's office and he threw his tin hat and all the rest of his business in the corner and he was off to go to the IWW hall. Well, no sooner did he go back to California than he became the secretary of the IWW Defense Committee and the next letter I got from him was from San Quentin Prison and he said he was right back where I started. Well, this was one who went to the war.

There were many others, of course, who refused and who went to prison as a consequence. We had a tremendous amnesty movement for their release and then, again, the degree of unity we had, as I look back on it, was remarkable. It ranged from religious circles, from the Quakers, all the way to the most extreme Left of that day. The Left of that day would be the IWW and the anarchists because this was before there was a Communist Party. There were no Communists around inciting all of this. This was pre-Communist Party days.

The American Civil Liberties Union was born in this struggle and many similar organizations. But the remarkable thing about it is that although sentences were 20 years and 10 years and 5 years, they were all released within about 5 years.



In fact, they were all out in about 1924 and strange as it may seem, the President who appointed an investigation committee and decreed amnesty for all those who were still in prison at that time, was President Coolidge, so let's say one good word at least for the man who, as Mrs. Longworth said, always looked as though he was weaned on a pickle.

### How the IWW differed from the AFL

I really should tell you something about where the IWW stood in relation to other organizations because the picture probably is not yet too clear. Well, it was not a craft union; it was an industrial union and it was opposed to the AFL, bitterly so. It did not stand for any of the things that the AFL stood for, a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, a brotherhood of capital and labor, none of those things. It was strong for fighting the boss every time we got a chance and so some of the things sound very strange, but it was the truth. They did not believe in making any contracts. They believed that as long as you were organized, you could hold the office to what it said it was going to do. But a contract, a piece of paper held you and so they didn't make any contracts. How, their attitudes towards what we call the white-collar workers was not good. Not good at all, because they just considered that they didn't belong to the working class. You had to wear overalls, be muscular, you had to work. If you were a pen pusher, you were not a worker, according to the IWW. Now, this also applied to students. In other words, what they would call today a very sectarian organization.

But to some extent the students of that day were responsible because the students had no sympathy with the labor movement. In fact, when there were strikes it was always possible, as I saw down in a hotel, at a strike in New York City, it was always possible to get students to go in and take the place of the workers. Well, times have changed, I am very glad to say. I doubt very much if any such situation could be developed even on the most conservative campuses in our country today. I might be wrong, but it wouldn't be a common factor.

Now, the IWW also differed from the AFL in that it stood for Socialism. Although it differed from the Socialist Party in that it rejected political parties and political action, and this might have been a reflection of its composition. In the West, the migratory workers did not vote and in the East, the foreign born workers did not vote.

Now, you go to Lawrence, not only their children and their grandchildren are voters, they are running for office and in some instances getting elected. So that there is quite a difference as a result of the change in the political status of the generation, but they had this very peculiar attitude that the real struggle was in the industries, in the shops, what they call at the point of production.

### William Z. Foster and Industrial Unionism

Now in 1912 we had a rather peculiar development that might have changed the history of the American labor movement if we had not been what we would call today, sectarians. At that time, William Z. Foster left the IWW, after touring in Europe, and meeting with the Syndicalists of Europe and there they pointed out to him that it seems to them very bad tactics to try to organize dual unions against existing unions, such as the miners, the machinists and other unions of the AFL but that other members of these categories we had in the IWW, we should send back into the AFL and, as he called it bore from within, and we should concentrate on the outside in organizing the unorganized workers with the aid of these people that we had sent back into the craft unions. Actually, from the point of view of today, actually he was right although I couldn't see it at the age of 22.

Fifty years later it looks different to me and it is very likely that if we had anticipated the organization of such a movement as the CIO many years before it came into existence. Well, Foster was so convinced that he was right, that he went into the AFL and I can't tell you what an act of treason that was, and he organized two bodies of basic workers in this country who had never been organized before, the steel workers and the packing-house workers. The packinghouse workers of Chicago and the steelworkers all over the and he led the strike, the great steel strike of 1919. Now, he had about a corps of 15 or 20 AFL organizers that were loaned to him by the AFL unions and they paid their salaries so you see it was really a very good strategy, and not only that, but years later I learned something from my friend, Vincent St. Johns, {*Vincent St. John, author of The I.W.W.: Its History, Structure And Methods Chicago, 1919*} who had been a secretary of the IWW for years and a personal friend of Foster's, that he went in there during 1919, to the steel workers' headquarters where they had all bought Liberty Bonds, all the organizers, Foster, all of them, and he said now, look here Bill, what are you doing with those Liberty Bonds, just putting them in a safe place. Give them to me and we will use it for bail for the IWW and that was done. The AFL organizers all turned over their bonds, their Liberty Bonds, to the IWW Defense Committee and many an IWW was bailed out as a result, although that wasn't known for many many years.

Of course, you understand that there were many new fields, new industries that came into existence before the organization of the CIO which did not exist when the IWW was organized. In fact, it almost seems to me that we lived in a kind of wilderness when I tell you what didn't exist. There were no radios, no TV, no movies, very little of advertising as we know it today, there were no plastics, no artificial fabrics, no airplanes. Maybe some fliers, you know, and there was no electronics or any of the big industries that we know today connected with it but the IWW did sow the seed in steel, mining, in lumber, in textiles, in agriculture, in oil and in maritime and you can see that those seeds bore fruit when it came to organizing later in the 1930's in the CIO.

### The 1920's Criminal Syndicalism Act and the Palmer Raids

Well, we weren't through in the 20's with just the war-time cases or with the amnesty campaign because as soon as the war was over and the workers had performed great patriotic services, kept no strike pledges, etc., the employer's opened up with an open shop drive and that's one reason why Foster was able to pull this great strike of steel and there were company unions that came into existence and there were criminal syndicalist laws that put temporary war-time sedition laws on the statute books as permanent legislation and there were deportation laws and all of this came in the wake of what was called the "Palmer Raids."

Mr. Palmer was the Quaker Attorney General of that day. I don't hold it against the Quakers because he certainly belied anything that they stood for. Palmer was the one who organized, under his direction, these raids from one end of the country to the other. Hundreds of people were scooped up one night from one end of the land to the other and the foreign born was put on one side for deportation, the native born were put on the other side for prosecution under the Criminal Syndicalist Laws. There is a very good pamphlet which I hope you research people have found, called the "Illegal Practices of the Department Justice" which was published at that time and signed by Professor Chafee, Professor Frankfurter and many other distinguished legal authorities of that day and it was at that time, I am not talking about modern times, I am talking about 1919, 1920, that Mr. J. Edgar Hoover first put in his appearance.

He was put in charge of these raids and all reports of all over the country were to be made to him, and they were called "G" men. The FBI came into existence a little later - in 1924. So he has had this kingdom for 38 years now, regardless of administrations and it is not actually under Civil Service or under the control of the Department of Justice.